

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA

BRIAN SCHWEITZER
GOVERNOR



JOHN BOHLINGER
LT. GOVERNOR

Monday, May 1, 2006

The Honorable Denny Rehberg
516 Cannon House Office Bldg.
Washington DC, 20515

Dear Congressman Rehberg:

As a father, Montana's Governor, and Chair of the Montana Board of Education, I am concerned that Congress is headed in the wrong direction when it comes to helping students attain the dream of a higher education.

For more than 40 years, the Higher Education Act has helped us become one of the greatest countries in the world through expanded educational opportunities for students. It has helped create new technologies, build public/private partnerships, and grow our economy. But now H.R. 609, Higher Education Authorization Act, which passed the US House and is scheduled for deliberations in the US Senate in the coming months, does little to increase student aid and lower the cost of student loans.

This Act comes on the heels of a \$12.7 billion reduction in student aid—the largest reduction ever—approved by Congress in December 2005. I join student advocates from across America and Montana in recognizing that in current form H.R. 609 does not accomplish the mission of higher education reauthorization, which is to make continuing strides in improving access, strengthening proven programs, and lowering student debt.

Montana's typical student debt load is around \$20,000. Helping our youth afford to go to college is a shared responsibility of families and Montana's state and federal policy makers. After years of sparse funding the 2005 Legislative Session resulted in nearly 13-percent increase in funding for the Montana University System, including the Governor's Scholarship-- aid that goes directly to students.

This Congress should be seeking to grow—not reduce—opportunities for our youth to attend college. In today's increasingly competitive and global environment continuing and strengthening our investment in higher education is more important than ever.

On behalf of Montana students and their families, I urge the United State Senate to craft a more equitable version of the Higher Education Reauthorization Act that restores previous cuts and provides funding to reduce student debt loads and help more Montana students afford to go to college.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B. Schweitzer", followed by a large, stylized flourish or checkmark-like mark.

BRIAN SCHWEITZER
Governor